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## SUCCESS STORY

### Activists Use New Media for Advocacy and Education



OTI/Lebanon

*Activists from Women in Technology, the National Commission of Lebanese Women, and other Lebanese NGOs were introduced to blogs and other Web technologies at RootSpace.*

***“New media makes Lebanon more successful because it is technology that helps to publish information online for all the world... it will help people to talk about the handicapped and understand our organization.”***

***—Hussein Maged,  
Lebanese Physically  
Handicapped Union***

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**October 2008** – Social advocates across Lebanon have begun applying powerful “new media” methodologies to advance a spectrum of causes, thanks to resources being provided by the Social Media Exchange project at RootSpace, a local NGO.

With support from the Office of Transition Initiatives, RootSpace has introduced activists from about 100 NGOs to a range of Web technologies such as blogs, wikis, social networks, digital fundraising, and Web 2.0. Given the high per capita use of the Internet in Lebanon and a polarized traditional media sector, these tools are giving civic actors alternate advocacy and education channels and new platforms for mobilizing community participation in civil society initiatives.

One highlight of this grant is a blog called “It’s Our Right, Don’t Ignore It!” A group of youths, most of whom are speech and hearing impaired, developed the blog and are creating a virtual community to promote the right to education for young people with disabilities. Members of the group who had not used the Internet before are now participating in Web research, creating educational tools, and forming online collaborations with other youth groups.

RootSpace trainees have been struck by new media’s ability to connect people across physical, social, and virtual spaces. “We didn’t know before how to really let people know about us – how to be able to reach more of the community,” said trainee Layal Buharam of Women in Technology. Hussein Maged hopes that the Facebook page he created for the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union will encourage “people with no disability [to] join for diversity and inclusion.” Another participant has launched a blog to provide resources to the marginalized population of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.

RootSpace is also hosting social hours to promote networking and stimulate discussions on emerging technologies. “We’re building communities around online methods,” said Project Director Jessica Dheere. RootSpace will soon release Facebook activism guides and a new media video. The organization expects to reach 75,000 people by the end of the six-month project, when it will spin off the Social Media Exchange as an independent entity dedicated to promoting new media for social change.